Disney
PRINCESS

Cinderella
A Princess at Last

Narinder Dhami

Cinderella
A Princess at Last

Two magical stories about everyone's favourite Princess

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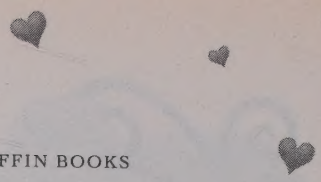

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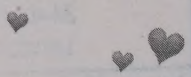

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Titles in the
Disney Princess *series:*

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
CINDERELLA
CINDERELLA: A PRINCESS AT LAST
JASMINE
SLEEPING BEAUTY
SNOW WHITE

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Aim to Please

Chapter One

Jaq, Gus and the other mice were very bored. They had moved to the King's palace to live with their friend Cinderella after she married the Prince. But Cinderella was away on her honeymoon with the Prince. The mice couldn't wait to see her again.

Suddenly the sound of loud trumpets made them all jump.

'Cinderelly's back!' Gus shouted gleefully.

In another part of the palace, the trumpets woke the Grand Duke, who had been having a nap. 'Oh, dear, they're back!' he said.

Prudence, one of the ladies-in-waiting, had also heard the trumpets. 'They're back!' she cried, and rushed off to tell the King.

Meanwhile, the royal carriage was rolling through the green countryside towards the castle.'Welcome home!' The Prince smiled.

'I still can't believe I'm going to live in a castle!' sighed Cinderella happily. 'Are you *sure* this isn't just a dream?'

The Prince laughed. 'You're a Princess now!' he told her.

Back at the palace, the King grumbled to Prudence and the Grand Duke. 'She won't know the first thing about being a Princess! It's going to be *your* duty to prepare the girl.'

The Grand Duke bowed deeply. 'Your Majesty, I am honoured –'

'Not you, ninny,' the King roared. 'Prudence!'

'Of course not *you*,' said Prudence snootily. 'He wants the job done right the first time.'

'The royal banquet will be Cinderella's responsibility from now on,' the King added.

Prudence looked horrified. 'The royal banquet?'

'You'll teach her everything she needs to know,' the King went on.

'But, sire,' Prudence wailed, 'she won't know anything about planning a royal banquet!'

In the royal carriage, Cinderella was saying

exactly the same to the Prince. 'But I don't know anything about planning a royal banquet!' she gasped. 'Oh, well . . .' She smiled. 'At least I can stay past midnight!'

But there was another shock waiting for Cinderella. When the royal carriage arrived at the castle, the King told his son that they had to leave straightaway. They had important matters of state to attend to.

'Father!' the Prince gasped. 'I can't just abandon my Princess! Not with the royal banquet only two days away!'

'Nonsense!' the King snapped, squeezing his tubby body into the carriage.

'She hasn't had time to prepare!' the Prince said anxiously. 'She's never been a Princess before!'

'Your Majesty,' Prudence put in, 'I can take care of the preparations, as I always do –'

'Just show her what to do!' the King roared. 'It's her duty to plan the banquet.' He sighed. 'And the King's duty to endure it! Now off we go!'

'I'm sorry I have to rush off,' said the Prince to his new wife.

'Don't worry,' Cinderella replied. 'I'll be fine.'

'I know you're going to surprise us with an incredible feast,' the Prince said.

Cinderella laughed. 'I just hope you're not *too* surprised!' she joked.

The Prince kissed her and joined his father in the carriage. The horses set off, and Cinderella watched them go, blowing a kiss after them.

Left on her own, Cinderella set off to explore the castle. She didn't really know her way around yet, and the rooms were so big and there were so many of them. It was all rather scary.

'Cinderelly!'

The mice tumbled out of a hole in the wall and ran towards her. Cinderella's face lit up.

'Jaq! Gus! Mary!' she cried. 'Hello, old friends!'

'Woof! Woof!'

Cinderella's faithful old dog, Bruno, ran to greet her too. Cinderella patted him lovingly on the head.

'Look – look!' squeaked Gus, pointing at

the King's throne. 'Big chair! For Princess Cinderelly!'

Cinderella crossed the room to the huge throne and touched it gently. 'Oh my . . .' she murmured. 'Big castle too.'

'Don't worry, Cinderelly,' Jaq said helpfully. 'Us mice here to help!'

'Why, thank you, Jaq!' Cinderella beamed. 'We've got a big day ahead of us tomorrow!'

Chapter Two

Down in the village the huge clock struck six times. It was morning, and the royal palace glittered in the glowing sunrise.

Inside the castle, Prudence rapped sharply on the door of Cinderella's bedroom. With her were two other ladies-in-waiting, Beatrice and Daphne.

There was no answer from inside the room, so Prudence opened the door. The three ladies filed in and stood beside the bed. They could hear loud snoring from under the covers.

'Ahem!' coughed Prudence. 'Good morning, Your Highness!'

The lump in the bed began to move. Prudence bent closer – and suddenly a huge, sloppy tongue shot out and licked her.

'Your Highness!' Prudence gasped.

But it wasn't Cinderella, it was Bruno! He

sat up and shook himself, sending spittle flying over all three ladies.

'Aaaaaaahhhh!' they screamed, fumbling for their hankies.

Down in the palace kitchen, Jaq and Gus were watching Cinderella, who was standing at the oven. Cinderella was wearing one of her own simple dresses and an apron.

'Ready for breakfast?' Cinderella asked. 'How does a cheese omelette sound?'

Jaq and Gus nodded eagerly. But suddenly the peace and quiet of the cosy kitchen was shattered by a loud scream.

'The Princess is missing!'

Prudence burst into the kitchen followed by Beatrice and Daphne.

'You, girl!' she barked at Cinderella. 'Have you seen the Princess?'

Cinderella turned round. 'Good morning, Prudence,' she said cheerfully.

'Oh . . . I thought – but those awful clothes!' Prudence muttered, looking very annoyed. 'Well, I – I didn't recognize you. Allow me to introduce your ladies-in-waiting, Beatrice and Daphne.'

'Pleased to meet you,' Cinderella said. 'You're just in time for breakfast.'

'Breakfast?' Daphne looked delighted. 'Oooh! With toast and jam?'

Prudence glared at her, and Daphne shrank back.

'Your Highness!' Prudence snapped. 'A Princess never prepares her own meals. That is not how things are done.'

Cinderella looked surprised. 'There are *rules* about breakfast?'

Prudence took the bowl Cinderella was holding. 'Oh, of *course* there are rules,' she replied, a little more kindly. 'But it's certainly not *your* fault that you don't know the traditions of the castle. That's what the King expects me to teach you.'

'I'm sure I can learn it in no time!' Cinderella cried eagerly.

'Um-hmm,' Prudence murmured, looking as if she didn't believe this at all. 'Come along. Just do as I say and everything will be fine.'

Prudence swept Cinderella off to her bedroom. There she, Beatrice and Daphne pinned up Cinderella's long hair. Then they

laced her into a corset so tight Cinderella could hardly breathe.

'The King would be horrified to find the hostess of the royal banquet dressed like a scullery maid!' Prudence said. 'A Princess must be attired like royalty!'

The three ladies-in-waiting then helped Cinderella into a frilly, fussy dress.

'Do I have to wear this all the time?' Cinderella asked glumly.

'Oh, of course not, Your Highness,' replied Beatrice, holding out a pair of very fancy shoes. 'You'll need something much more formal for dinner.'

Cinderella looked at the shoes with alarm. 'Couldn't I just wear one of my own dresses?' she asked.

Prudence laughed. 'Oh, very amusing, Your Highness! But it simply isn't done!'

Cinderella felt very uncomfortable. Her corset was too tight, the dress was too fancy and the shoes pinched her toes. She stared at herself in the mirror, looking dismayed. Was this *really* what being a Princess was all about?

Chapter Three

'It's such a beautiful day,' Cinderella sighed as she walked down the long, dim gallery with the three ladies-in-waiting. 'Why don't we open the curtains?'

Jaq and Gus, who were listening, nodded their heads eagerly.

Prudence looked shocked. 'No, no, no!' she snapped. 'These curtains are *never* opened! It most definitely isn't done!'

They made their way to the royal dining hall, where the long table was covered with platters of food.

'Dukes and Viscounts sit nearest the King, unless there is a Marquis present,' Beatrice told Cinderella.

'Wouldn't it be nice if people could just sit wherever they liked?' Cinderella asked.

Beatrice chuckled. 'You must never seat a

Duke above a Marquis or below a Baron,' she went on.

A servant rushed over carrying two napkins.

'Which colour is correct, Your Highness?' Daphne quizzed Cinderella. 'Cream or ecru?'

Cinderella looked closely at the napkins. They both looked exactly the same colour to her.

'Uh – ecru?' she guessed.

'Goodness, no,' Prudence sniffed. '*Cream*.'

'But there isn't any difference!' Cinderella laughed.

'Oh my,' Prudence sighed. 'So much to learn, so little time.'

Jaq and Gus frowned.

'At the banquet, as always,' Prudence went on, 'the royal menu shall consist of the rarest roast beef, French onion soup, tarragon mashed potatoes, freshly baked baguettes, the finest truffles in the kingdom and, for dessert – Norwegian stewed prunes.'

Cinderella screwed up her nose, and so did Jaq and Gus.

'Prunes?' Cinderella repeated. 'For dessert?'

'The King expects it,' Prudence replied coldly. 'It is a tradition that is *never* broken.'

Next Prudence took Cinderella to the palace courtyard.

'Your Highness shall pause here to greet her noble guests,' Prudence told her as they walked down the drive.

'Remember,' Beatrice added, 'curtsey to royalty, wave to nobility.'

'I know I can do *this* right!' Cinderella said eagerly.

She began to wave her hand. For once, Prudence looked pleased – until she saw Cinderella waving and smiling at a group of villagers waiting at the palace gates.

'Cinderella! Hello!' they called.

'Hello! How nice to see you!' Cinderella called happily, running towards them. 'Wait, just a minute.' She looked up at the guard in the tower. 'Open the gates!'

'No, no, no!' Prudence snapped. 'These gates are only opened for royal visitors.' She looked down her nose at the villagers. 'Commoners are never allowed in the palace!'

Glumly the villagers began to move away.

One little boy, who was holding a flower for Cinderella, began to cry.

Cinderella peered through the iron bars of the palace gates, watching the villagers leave. She felt like a prisoner in her own home. Sadly she turned and followed Prudence and the others back to the royal gallery. There, a group of bored-looking musicians played a dull tune, while Prudence tried to teach Cinderella how to dance. She piled a stack of books on top of poor Cinderella's head to keep her back straight. Jaq and Gus looked very worried.

'It must be perfect!' Prudence said sternly, placing a ruler under Cinderella's chin to tip her head up. 'It is the King's favourite dance.'

Beatrice ran forward with a servant holding two more napkins.

'Your Highness,' Beatrice said, 'eggshell or bone?'

Cinderella did her best. 'Eggshell?'

'*Bone*,' sighed Prudence.

'Now, who sits next to the Count?' Daphne asked.

'The Duke?' Cinderella guessed.

'The Marquis,' Prudence corrected her.

Cinderella began to feel dizzy. Wherever she turned, there were more questions.

'Gold or silver?' asked Beatrice.

Cinderella couldn't think straight. 'For what?'

'Baron or Viscount?' Daphne wanted to know.

'Pekoe or Darjeeling?' Beatrice put in.

'I don't know!' Cinderella gasped.

'Braised or broiled?'

'Fish or fowl?'

'Stand or sit?'

Cinderella felt dizzier and dizzier.

'Your Highness!' Prudence rapped out.

Right at that moment, Cinderella stumbled and fell. She tumbled head over heels and landed in a heap at Prudence's feet.

'Your Highness,' Prudence said wearily, 'the dance is best performed *on one's feet*.'

Her sarcastic words hurt Cinderella's feelings very much. For a moment she stared angrily up at Prudence. Then she rose gracefully to her feet, ignoring Daphne who

had rushed to help her. Quietly she left the room without saying a word.

'This is a disaster!' Prudence announced.

Outside the door, Cinderella had heard what Prudence said. She buried her face in her hands and rushed upstairs.

Chapter Four

Cinderella lay on her bed, weeping into her pillow. Jaq, Gus and Mary were watching her, feeling very sad themselves.

'Poor Cinderelly!' Jaq sighed. 'Please don't cry!'

'Jaq, what am I going to do?' Cinderella sobbed. 'I'm a complete failure as a Princess. Why can't I learn to do this right?'

She stood up and stared at herself in the mirror, at her fussy dress and fancy hairstyle. 'Ugh, look at me,' she muttered.

'Cinderelly not look like Cinderelly!' Jaq declared.

'It's true,' Cinderella agreed. 'Something's just not right here.'

'Like stewed prunes?' Gus suggested from his perch on the pillow.

'Exactly, Gus!' Cinderella agreed. 'And why

do they have to keep the palace so dark? And that awful dance! And those boring colours! And *especially* all those rules about keeping commoners out of the palace! Why, *I* was a dishmaid when the Prince married me!' She stared thoughtfully at the mice. 'And he loves me because I'm me.'

Cinderella ran behind a dressing-screen and began to pull off the frilly dress. 'I've been trying to obey someone else's rules about who I should be and how I should dress.' She threw the dress aside. 'This hair! Ew!'

A moment or two later Cinderella stepped out from behind the screen. She was wearing one of her own simple dresses, and her hair was loose.

'I just have to stop trying to be someone else,' she told the mice. 'I'm going to plan this banquet *my* way.'

And the mice gave her a thumbs-up.

The next morning, Cinderella began putting her plan into action. She went down to the palace gates with Daphne and told the guard to open them. The guard grinned and cranked

the rusty gate wheel until they opened wide. Singing, Cinderella walked out with Daphne scurrying along beside her. Prudence saw what was happening and rushed after them.

'When you follow your heart, there's no heart you can't win!' Cinderella sang happily, as she and Daphne walked into the marketplace. Cinderella handed an invitation to the banquet to the flower-seller and walked on. Prudence almost fainted with shock.

'Your Highness, the King would not approve,' she warned angrily. 'You're supposed to be inviting Dukes and Counts and other aristocrats.'

'I *am* inviting them,' Cinderella replied. 'Along with all my friends here in the village.'

Prudence was so shocked she could hardly speak. 'Your Highness,' she began, 'it's simply not the way things are done!'

'Perhaps the time has come to try something new,' Cinderella said gently, and she turned and handed an invitation to the baker. Then she went on her way, singing sweetly.

Back at the palace, Cinderella went to the kitchen and put on her apron.

'This party needs help,' she said firmly, 'starting with *dessert*.'

'No prunes!' agreed Gus, who was watching with Jaq.

'Jaq-Jaq love chocolate,' said Jaq and tipped a container of chocolate powder into the mixing-bowl. Gus knocked over a bottle of milk, spilling it into the bowl too.

'Chocolate pudding!' Cinderella laughed. 'Now that sounds good!'

After the pudding was made, Cinderella went to the royal gallery with Daphne and Beatrice. There she asked the musicians to play some different tunes, and soon they didn't look bored at all as Cinderella and Daphne danced their way through a lively waltz.

'We never get to dance like this!' Daphne giggled.

Cinderella swept Beatrice into the dance too, and then smiled as Daphne and Beatrice danced together, laughing loudly. Suddenly Prudence appeared at the door. She took one look at them, and began to shake with rage.

'It simply isn't done!' she scolded. 'IT SIMPLY ISN'T DONE!'

And she turned and stormed out of the room.

Chapter Five

Cinderella looked around the royal dining hall. The feast was nearly ready and the servants were lining up. It was the day of the royal banquet.

'Your Highness?' Beatrice bustled over, holding up two tablecloths. 'Sand or buff?'

'Which colour do *you* like?' Cinderella smiled.

'Hmmmm . . .' Beatrice thought about it, then she grinned. 'Pink!'

Cinderella glanced around the huge room. 'Something's still missing,' she said to herself. Then she realized what it was.

Cinderella went over to the window and flung back the heavy curtains. Bright, golden sunlight streamed into the room.

'Now that's more like it!' Cinderella said happily.

'Ooooh!' gasped the servants, their faces breaking into smiles.

'Ah!' Prudence rushed over, looking all in a dither. 'What will the King say?'

'I know this is a big change,' Cinderella replied, gently but firmly, 'but I have to try this my way.'

Prudence drew back coldly. 'Well, then,' she said in an icy voice, 'I certainly hope you know what you're doing.'

I hope so too, Cinderella thought as she went upstairs to her bedroom to change.

Cinderella had just finished dressing in a pretty blue gown, when Jaq and Gus saw the first carriages rolling into the palace courtyard.

'They're here, Cinderelly!' called Jaq.

Cinderella walked over to the window. 'Well, it's too late to turn back now,' she sighed.

Her heart beating very fast, Cinderella left her room and went to the top of the stairs. She peered nervously round a curtain, and then smiled with relief. Everybody was already having a wonderful time! The band was

playing a lively tune and people were dancing.

Cinderella hurried downstairs and began to greet her guests. She made sure that the rich, important people met her friends from the village, and everybody seemed to be getting on very well. Except Prudence. She was watching the party with a look of disgust on her face.

'This dance is *horrifying*!' she muttered.

Cinderella spotted the little boy who hadn't been allowed to give her the flower. He had brought it with him again, and Cinderella took it, kissed him and then danced around the room with him.

Suddenly there was a fanfare of trumpets.

'The King has arrived,' Prudence announced.

Cinderella suddenly felt very nervous. The servants flung open the doors and everyone stopped dancing. Then the King appeared. He stood and stared at the scene before him as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

At that very moment an excited Daphne ran out of the kitchen, carrying a big silver bowl on a tray.

'WOOOOOO-HOO!' she screamed, '*PUDDING!*'

She ran right into the King, knocking him on to his backside. The pudding bowl flew through the air and landed with a *SPLAT!* on the King's head.

The crowd gasped in horror, while Prudence looked very smug indeed. The King climbed to his feet as chocolate pudding dripped down his face.

'WHAT IN BLAZES IS GOING ON HERE?' he roared angrily.

'Welcome home!' The Prince helped his new bride out of the carriage.

'I know you are going to surprise us!' the Prince said warmly.

'Do I have to wear this all the time?' Cinderella asked Prudence.

To Prudence's horror, Cinderella opened up the curtains.

The King licked his lips. 'Mmm ... chocolate, my favourite!'

'I am honoured to be at Her Highness's service!' said Prudence.

Jaq was very pleased to be a human.

Jaq pretended he had picked the flowers for Cinderella.

The Countess fluttered her eyelashes at Jaq.

'I'm so glad you're back!' Mary smiled at Jaq.

Fairy Godmother waved her wand
and the sky filled with fireworks.

Chapter Six

Prudence scurried over to the King.

'Your Majesty!' she wailed.

The King didn't seem to notice the pudding bowl on his head. Frowning, he pointed at the window.

'Who opened those curtains?' he yelled.

'This is all Princess Cinderella's doing!' Prudence told him.

'Oooh, what a lovely moon!' the King sighed.

'I tried to teach her, sire,' Prudence began.

The King wasn't listening. He was staring at the guests and looking very annoyed. 'Commoners?' he shouted. 'In the palace?'

'But she simply refused to listen,' Prudence added.

An old man from the village hurried forward to help the King to his feet. The

King stared at him grumpily, but then smiled.

'Oh! Hello, Giuseppe!'

'It's a scandal,' Prudence sniffed.

Cinderella hurried over to the King. 'Your Majesty,' she began nervously, 'I can explain!'

Suddenly the King realized that there was something dripping down his face.

'What is this?' he asked, wiping it away.

'Your dessert, sire,' Cinderella replied.

The King looked as if he were going to explode with rage. 'No prunes for dessert?' he roared.

'An absolute outrage!' Prudence declared.

'Mmmm! *Chocolate!*' The King beamed as a dollop of pudding dripped into his mouth. 'My favourite!' He glanced round at the guests, who were still staring nervously at him. 'What happened to the music? Everybody dance!'

The band began to play again. Daphne rushed forward to remove the pudding bowl from the King's head and he smiled at her.

Just then the Prince came into the room, looking a little worried. He hurried over to Cinderella and kissed her.

'I always said we needed some new traditions around here!' the King cried. He pushed Prudence into the arms of the Grand Duke and shoved them towards the dance floor. 'Go on now, Prudence! You're missing all the fun!'

Prudence and the Grand Duke looked shyly at each other as they whirled away together.

'Splendid job,' the King beamed. 'Splendid!'

'It is the Princess who deserves your praise, sire,' Prudence told him, as she spun round the dance floor. 'And I am honoured to be at Her Highness's service.'

Cinderella smiled. 'I think we're going to be great friends,' she agreed.

The King took Cinderella over to one of the thrones. 'I told my son he had chosen well,' he laughed. 'You're a natural!'

He placed a crown on Cinderella's head as the crowd cheered.

'Another dance!' the King ordered the band, and they struck up a merry tune.

'I'm glad you do things your own way,' the Prince whispered to Cinderella.

'Someday I'll get this Princess thing right,' Cinderella laughed.

'I think that day is today,' the Prince replied, and kissed her.

Tall Tail

Chapter One

One beautiful spring morning, Cinderella's mouse friends Jaq and Gus were walking in the palace gardens. The gardens were fresh and green and full of bright flowers, and the sun shone brightly.

Jaq hurried through the garden with a determined look on his face. Gus followed him, but a lot slower.

'What're we doing in the garden, Jaq?' Gus grumbled. 'Gus not have breakfast yet.'

'Gus-Gus, we're going to pick flowers for Cinderelly,' Jaq told him.

'What for?' panted Gus, tripping over a fallen flower stem.

'Because we never get a chance to do anything for Cinderelly now,' Jaq sighed.

'Oh, Cinderelly don't need mice-mice,'

replied Gus. 'She's got lots of people to help her.'

Jaq stopped by a yellow tulip. 'Well, I wanna bring her a big bunch of flowers,' he said, and he began to pull at the flower stem.

Pom-Pom, the fat, white palace cat, was sitting in one of the windows. She spotted the yellow tulip waving about in the middle of all the flowers and looked excited. She dashed downstairs and out into the garden.

Jaq was picking more tulips and loading them into Gus's arms. He had picked so many that Gus's head was hidden behind the big bunch of flowers.

'That's enough,' Gus squeaked.

'You've got to think big, Gus-Gus,' replied Jaq.

Suddenly a twig snapped nearby. Jaq's eyes opened wide as he looked past Gus. Pom-Pom was inching her way slowly towards them!

'Rowrrrr!' Pom-Pom snarled, springing forward. But she was too late. The mice had already scuttled off through a crack in the wall, still carrying the flowers.

Jaq and Gus hurried upstairs, eager to give

their flowers to Cinderella. They marched through an open door – and then came to a halt. Cinderella was standing with the Grand Duke, and next to them was an enormous bouquet of flowers.

'Your flowers, Highness,' the Duke was saying.

'Well, thank you,' Cinderella smiled, bending to smell them. 'Oh, these are even prettier than yesterday's.'

Jaq hung his head. Cinderella wouldn't want *their* flowers now.

'Here's the list of the remaining preparations for the Festival tomorrow,' the Grand Duke announced, and he unrolled a very long piece of paper.

'Oh,' Cinderella sighed. 'We sure throw a lot of parties round here, don't we?'

'This is no mere party, Highness,' replied the Grand Duke. '*This* is the Spring Festival!'

'The Festival Committee is assembled in the library, awaiting your instructions,' the Grand Duke continued.

He went out again and Cinderella followed.

*

'Good morning, Jaq!' called a shy voice.

Mary, one of the other mice, had popped out of a mouse-hole. She went over to Jaq, who was looking very glum, and showed him the smart blue jacket she was holding.

'Pretty coat,' said Jaq, looking a bit happier.

'I made it for you,' Mary beamed. 'Wanna try it on?'

'Ohhh!' Jaq looked even more cheerful as he slipped the coat on. 'Very nice.'

But while Jaq was admiring his new coat, Gus looked up and spotted the Grand Duke's list on the table.

'Cinderelly forgot party list!' he shouted.

Jaq glanced up and saw it too. 'Jaq can help!' he cried. 'Take list to Cinderelly! Cinderelly!' He slid down the table leg, grabbed the list and ran off. 'I'll be right back!' he called.

At last he had a chance to do something for Cinderella!

Chapter Two

'Very well,' Cinderella said, 'the Prince and I will cut the ribbon to begin the Festival.' She looked round at the very important people seated at the table. 'Now, any other suggestions?'

Underneath the table, Jaq was pushing and pulling the heavy list towards Cinderella. It was hard work because he was having to climb over everyone's feet.

'Perhaps this year we should not invite the children,' the Duc de Grave suggested.

'Indeed, indeed.' The Viscount Biensur nodded his head. 'No children. A brilliant idea!'

'But the Festival is *for* the children,' Cinderella reminded them.

'Oh, I suppose.' The Duc looked glum. 'But the lines are so loooong.'

'No problem,' said Cinderella cheerfully. 'We'll add more rides!'

Jaq was still trying to push the list towards Cinderella's shoes at the end of the table. Meanwhile, the butler was going round, filling everyone's teacups. Eagerly the Countess leaned over to take a cake from the tray. She was a round, plump lady in a bright pink and purple dress.

Suddenly she dropped her napkin under the table and bent down to pick it up. She didn't realize that her napkin had dropped right over Jaq. So when she picked up the napkin, she picked up the mouse too!

There was a loud crash as plates fell to the floor. The Countess had jumped up from her seat, screaming with fright, and knocked the tea tray over.

'I can't stand mice!' she shrieked, rushing out into the hallway. 'Oh! Oh! Mice! Ew!'

Jaq was just as frightened as the Countess was. He ran for his life and hid behind a table leg. There he stayed until Cinderella came to find him.

'Jaq, are you all right?' she asked anxiously.

Jaq looked very glum. 'No help to Cinderelly,' he muttered. 'Just make a big mess.'

'Tell you what,' Cinderella said gently, 'I'm about to go out to the fairgrounds. Why don't you meet me at the stables in ten minutes? I could really use your help.'

'No problem!' replied Jaq, beaming happily. And this time he *wouldn't* make a big mess of it!

Chapter Three

Ten minutes later, Jaq strolled round to the stables. He was feeling very pleased with himself and humming a tune.

Suddenly a big horse's hoof crashed to the ground right next to him. Jaq jumped nervously out of the way. Suddenly there were horses' hoofs and human feet all around him. Jaq had to jump and dodge his way across the yard to the stable.

'Phew!' he panted, rushing through the door.

Now that he was safe, Jaq suddenly noticed how big the stable was. He frowned. 'Whoa!' he muttered. 'Not sure Cinderelly find me down here.'

Jaq looked around and spotted a hay wagon. He began to climb up the wagon

wheel, but when he reached the top, he disappeared into the pile of hay.

Right at that moment Cinderella came to the stable doorway to look for him.

'Jaq?' she called.

Jaq popped out of the hay when he heard Cinderella's voice.

'Jaq?' she called again.

Jaq opened his mouth to answer her when suddenly a giant pitchfork picked him up, along with a huge pile of hay. He struggled to get free, but he was caught between the pitchfork's prongs. 'Oof!'

Jaq and the bundle of hay were flung across the stable into one of the horses' stalls.

The stablehand with the pitchfork went over to the Princess. 'Your Highness,' he said, 'your escort is waiting for you outside.'

'Thank you,' Cinderella replied. She stroked her horse, and looked around again. 'Jaq?'

'Cinderelly!' Jaq called from inside the stall.

But Cinderella couldn't hear him. She climbed on to her horse and rode out of the stable.

'Oh, well, I guess he couldn't come,' she said to herself.

'Oh no!' Jaq groaned as he heard the *clip-clop* of the horse's hoofs. Cinderella had gone without him!

Chapter Four

Jaq walked up and down one of the garden benches. He was feeling very unhappy.

'Never get to do anything any more!' he muttered. 'Never get to help! Too small to help Cinderelly! No good to anybody!'

Behind the tall grass, Pom-Pom was lurking. She had Jaq in her sights and began slinking towards him.

'Castle not like old house,' Jaq grumbled. 'Castle for big people. No place for mice, no place. Everything bigger than me. Even flowers bigger.'

Pom-Pom was hiding behind a large urn, staring at Jaq. This time she was going to get him!

'Don't like being small,' Jaq went on. 'Don't like being a mouse! *I wish I were big!*'

Suddenly a shower of sparkles whirled

and swirled around him. Jaq stared at them, his eyes wide. Pom-Pom stared too.

The next moment, Fairy Godmother appeared from the shower of sparkles. Pom-Pom was scared and jumped behind the birdbath with a yowl.

'There, there, dear,' Fairy Godmother said kindly to Jaq. She sat down on the bench and looked around her. Jaq seemed to have disappeared. 'Jaq?'

Jaq let out a little grunt and managed to squeeze his way out from underneath Fairy Godmother, who had sat on top of him.

'Oh, there you are, dear,' Fairy Godmother beamed. 'I heard your wish, Jaq. Aren't you happy the way you are?'

Jaq shook his head. 'Only big people help Cinderelly,' he said. 'I want to be big. No, I want to be human.'

Fairy Godmother looked surprised. 'Human?' she said. 'Oh, good heavens. But, Jaq, you've always helped Cinderella just the way you are.'

'Cinderelly's a Princess now,' Jaq sighed. 'No time for mice. Nobody likes mice anyway.'

'So *that's* what you think?' asked Fairy Godmother.

Jaq nodded. 'I get beat up by cat and horse and big scary lady! Humans are bigger. Bigger, better!'

'If you really feel that way . . .' Fairy Godmother said slowly, 'perhaps it *would* be for the best to grant your wish,' she went on.

Jaq watched, his face full of hope, as sparkles swirled around Fairy Godmother's wand.

'Bib-bi-di . . . Bob-bi-di . . . BOO!'

Fairy Godmother pointed her wand at Jaq, and sparkles flew from it in a shower of bright light. Pom-Pom watched, amazed, as Jaq was turned into a human!

Jaq looked down at himself, blinking in amazement. Meanwhile, Pom-Pom was working out that Jaq was now human. *Mmm, more to go round!* Pom-Pom thought, licking her lips eagerly.

Beaming, Jaq set off down the garden path. As he crossed the bridge Jaq stopped to stare at his reflection in the water. 'I really am human,' he said happily.

Then he went on his way, with Pom-Pom sneaking along behind him.

At the festival grounds, everyone was very busy. The workers were grooming horses and decorating carriages and setting up tents, ready for the Spring Festival. Cinderella was there too, checking her list.

'There she is,' Jaq said to himself. 'What am I going to say? Cinderelly, it's me, Jaq! Look, I'm human now!'

'Princess Cinderelly!' Jaq shouted excitedly. 'It's me! I'm – oof!'

At that very moment two workers passed by, carrying a board with a bucket of cement balanced on it. The board hit Jaq, and the bucket of cement fell right over his head.

Cinderella and the Grand Duke rushed over to him.

'Oh! You poor man!' Cinderella cried.

Jaq yanked the bucket off his head. 'I am hu–' he began.

'Oh, Sir Hugh, is it?' the Grand Duke said. 'Well, then, pleased to know you.'

'Are you all right, Sir Hugh?' asked Cinderella.

Cinderella gave Jaq her handkerchief to clean himself up.

'Here, let me help you,' she offered.

'No, no, that's why I'm here,' Jaq said quickly. 'To help *you* –'

'Oh!' Cinderella looked pleased. 'You're here to help with the Spring Festival! Shall we ride back together?'

'Ride?' Jaq gasped. 'On *horses*?'

A little while later, Cinderella trotted home to the palace on her horse. Suddenly another horse raced past them at great speed. Clinging to its back was Jaq. He looked very scared indeed.

'Sir Hugh,' Cinderella called after him in a worried voice, 'have you ridden before?'

The horse and Jaq crashed into a clump of trees. Cinderella hurried after them and found a rather battered Jaq covered in twigs and leaves and peach blossoms. Quickly Jaq handed the flowers to Cinderella, pretending he'd picked them.

'They're beautiful.' Cinderella smiled. 'Thank you.'

Back at the palace, the Grand Duke was getting into a tizzy.

'Ah, Highness, there you are!' he cried. 'The tailor is in a dither and the cook is having a crisis! And they're all asking for you!'

Cinderella handed the blossoms to Jaq. 'Could you please find a vase for these?' she asked. 'I'll be right back. Thank you, Sir Hugh. You're a big help.'

Jaq beamed. At last he was doing *something* right!

Then Jaq stopped. His nose twitched as he sniffed the air. He turned – and there lying on the floor was a big piece of Swiss cheese.

'Mmmmmmm!'

Jaq's eyes lit up. He bend down to grab the cheese, but then he looked up – and saw Pom-Pom ready to spring!

Chapter Five

'Pom-Pom!' Jaq yelled. The cat had set a trap, and he'd fallen for it!

Jaq turned and dashed off down the hall, still clutching the bouquet of peach blossom. Pom-Pom was right behind him.

'I shouldn't be afraid of cat,' Jaq panted. 'I am human now. Bigger than cat.'

Jaq spotted a mouse-hole ahead of him. He skidded across the floor towards it, but then he smacked into the wall head first. He'd forgotten how big he was!

Jaq jumped to his feet. Pom-Pom was closing in on him, a smug grin on her fluffy white face. Jaq grabbed the first thing he could see, which was a large vase. He lifted it up, ready to throw it at the cat.

'Oh, good!' said Cinderella, from behind him. 'You found a vase!'

Jaq plonked the flowers in the vase and grinned nervously at Cinderella. 'Happy to help,' he gulped.

'Your Highness,' called the Grand Duke, 'the Countess LeGrand is awaiting you in the dining hall.'

Cinderella turned to Jaq. 'Do you think you could keep her company 'til I get there?' she asked.

Jaq nodded. As he followed Cinderella he glanced back at Pom-Pom. She stared back at him with a gleam in her eye.

Jaq hurried off to find the Countess. But when he reached the dining hall, he suddenly heard a loud scream from behind the door. It was a scream he'd heard before!

'A mouse! EEEEEEEK!'

'Oh, no!' Jaq groaned. 'Gus-Gus!' Jaq dashed into the room. Gus and the other mice were running for their lives as the Countess chased after them with a poker.

Suddenly she spotted Jaq. She dropped the poker and jumped into his arms, fluttering her eyelashes at him.

'My hero!' she sighed, clinging to Jaq's neck. 'You saved me!'

Just then Cinderella came into the room. 'Well,' she smiled, 'I think we just found the couple to lead the first dance! We'd better go and get ready. See you at the Festival!'

Jaq was shown to a room and given some new clothes to change into. He was just about to put on a pair of shoes with shiny buckles, when he heard a voice he knew.

'Hey, Mary, where's Jaq-Jaq?'

It was Gus. Jaq looked round eagerly and was just in time to see his friend vanish into a mouse-hole. Jaq rushed over and got down on his hands and knees.

'Here I am!' he beamed, sticking his face right up to the mouse-hole.

All the mice screamed with terror and fled.

'Jaq!' said a voice behind him. 'Is everything all right?'

It was Fairy Godmother.

'Oh, yes, great!' Jaq replied. 'No problem!'

'Well, I think you gave your friends a bit

of a fright.' Fairy Godmother said gently.

'They ran away from me,' Jaq sighed. 'Even Mary.'

'Aren't you happy being human?' asked Fairy Godmother.

Jaq put on his shoes. 'Yeah, sure not as easy as I thought. But I know I'll get it!'

It was evening, and time for the start of the Spring Festival. The festival grounds were lit with torches, and in the middle stood a large Ferris wheel.

Cinderella and the Prince were standing at the entrance, ready to cut the red ribbon.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' Cinderella announced, 'let the Spring Festival begin.'

Soon everyone was having a wonderful time. Crowds of people gathered to watch a juggling jester and try their hand at the sideshows. Children watched a puppet show and laughed loudly. There was even an elephant giving rides.

'Oh-hoo, an elephant!' the King said excitedly. He grabbed the Grand Duke. 'I just love elephants! Let's go!' And he hustled the

Grand Duke over to the elephant to take a ride, even though the Duke didn't look very keen at all.

Meanwhile, Jaq had managed to find Cinderella in the crowds.

'Sir Hugh,' she smiled, 'are you enjoying yourself?'

'Well, um –' Jaq whispered, 'there's something –'

But at that moment the Countess rushed up to them, fluttering her eyelashes at Jaq.

'You're not whispering about *me*, are you?' she giggled, grabbing his arm.

'I believe I promised you two the first dance!' Cinderella laughed, sending them on to the dance floor.

Jaq wasn't very good at dancing. He did his best, but he couldn't keep up with the Countess as she dragged him round the floor.

Jaq couldn't stand it any longer. He ran off as fast as he could, peeking over his shoulder to see if the Countess was coming after him. Not looking where he was going, he stumbled into the Ferris wheel and ended up on one of the seats. As the wheel turned, moving higher,

Jaq stared down at the ground. He didn't like being so high, but at least he was safe from the Countess!

Something sitting on the seat beside him gave a mew. Jaq realized he was not alone. He looked down, and there was Pom-Pom!

Chapter Six

'Nice k-kitty!' Jaq gasped in a frightened voice.

As Pom-Pom moved towards him, Jaq backed out of his seat and climbed up towards the top of the Ferris wheel. He had nowhere else to go. Down below, the crowd watched as he climbed higher.

Suddenly Jaq lost his footing. He tumbled backwards. Down, down, down he fell. He landed right on the back of the elephant which was just passing by, carrying the King and the Grand Duke.

The elephant was so shocked he trumpeted loudly. As Jaq bounced off and landed in the dirt, the elephant roared again, and began to swing round in a panic. The Grand Duke flew out of his seat and tried to save himself by grabbing the elephant's tail.

But the elephant panicked again and flicked the Grand Duke away like an insect. The Duke sailed through the air and landed on top of one of the tents, which collapsed to the ground.

The elephant bolted, and began to race up and down while the King hung on for dear life. Now the crowd had begun to panic too. They ran in all directions, trying to escape from the wild elephant. Cinderella watched in alarm.

'Stop!' yelled the King, but the elephant took no notice.

Jaq was horrified. 'This is all my fault!' he groaned. 'Wish Fairy Godmother was here!'

Suddenly Fairy Godmother appeared in a whirl of sparkles.

'Jaq, this is your chance to help,' she beamed.

Jaq looked amazed. 'What can I do?' he asked.

'Let's see now . . .' Fairy Godmother said thoughtfully. 'Hmm, an elephant. What do you think could stop him? Perhaps, a mouse? Aren't all elephants afraid of mice?'

Jaq nodded eagerly.

'Are you a man or a mouse?' asked Fairy Godmother with a smile.

'*I'm* a mouse!' Jaq declared firmly.

Immediately he rushed out into the path of the charging elephant and held up his hand to stop it.

'Sit, sit!' the King was roaring, but the elephant just ignored him. It carried on charging straight towards Jaq.

Jaq gave Fairy Godmother a thumbs-up. She smiled and nodded.

'BIB-BI-DI . . . BOB-BI-DI . . . BOO!'

A swirl of sparkles whirled around Jaq. Suddenly he was a mouse again!

The elephant saw him and screeched to a halt. It stopped so suddenly that the King flew out of his seat and landed on the Ferris wheel. Looking terrified, the elephant shrank back and covered its eyes with its ears. The crowd began to cheer.

'I guess there are some things only a mouse can do!' grinned Jaq, twirling his tail. 'Yes, I'm a mouse!'

Pom-Pom had been watching everything

that was going on. Now she closed in on Jaq again. But before she could get to him, she was grabbed by a pair of plump arms.

'Oh, Sir Hugh's kitty!' cooed the Countess. 'Come, sweetums, let's go find your master!'

Pom-Pom could only mew crossly as the Countess carried her away.

Mary and Gus hurried over to Jaq.

'Jaq!' Mary hugged him. 'That was so brave!'

'Jaq! You saved the day!' Cinderella said gratefully. 'I can always count on you. You're right there when I need you!'

Jaq bowed.

'I'm so glad you're back!' Mary cried, and gave him a big kiss. Jaq kissed her back and, at the same moment, Fairy Godmother waved her wand and filled the sky above the castle with glittering fireworks.

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